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# Security Council

Sixty-first year

*Provisional*

**5489**th meeting

Friday, 14 July 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

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| *President:* | Mr. De La Sablière | (France) |
| *Members:* | Argentina | Mr. Mayoral |
| | China | Mr. Liu Zhengmin |
| | Congo | Mr. Ikouebe |
| | Denmark | Ms. Løj |
| | Ghana | Nana Effah-Apenteng |
| | Greece | Mrs. Papadopoulou |
| | Japan | Mr. Kitaoka |
| | Peru | Mr. Pereyra Plasencia |
| | Qatar | Mr. Al-Qahtani |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Dolgov |
| | Slovakia | Mr. Mlynár |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Sir Emyr Jones Parry |
| | United Republic of Tanzania | Mr. Mahiga |
| | United States of America | Mr. Bolton |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 13 July 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/517)

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06-42993 (E)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East**

**Letter dated 13 July 2006 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/517)**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Israel and Lebanon, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

*At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.*

*At the invitation of the President, Mr. Makmoud (Lebanon) took a seat at the Council table.*

**The President** (spoke in French): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Guéhenno to take a seat at the Council table.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in response to the request contained in the letter dated 13 July 2006 from the Chargé d'Affaires of Lebanon addressed to the President of the Security Council, document S/2006/517.

I wish to draw the attention of the members to documents S/2006/518 and S/2006/522, containing the text of letters dated 13 July 2006 from the Chargé d'Affaires of Lebanon addressed to the President of the Security Council, and document S/2006/515, containing the text of a letter dated 12 July 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Israel addressed to the President of the Council.

The Security Council will now hear a briefing by Mr. Jean-Marie Guehenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. I give him the floor.

**Mr. Guehenno**: As Council members are aware, the most serious crisis between Israel and Lebanon since the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from south Lebanon in 2000 has broken out, with rising numbers of casualties on both sides.

The crisis started on 12 July, when, at about 9 o'clock local time, Hizbollah launched several rockets from Lebanese territory across the Blue Line towards Israel Defense Forces (IDF) positions near the coast and in the area of the Israeli town of Zarit. Shortly afterwards, Hizbollah fighters crossed the Blue Line into Israel and attacked an IDF patrol. Hizbollah captured two IDF soldiers, killed three others and wounded two more. The captured soldiers were taken into Lebanon.

Subsequent to the attack on the patrol, a heavy exchange of fire ensued across the Blue Line between Hizbollah and the IDF. While the exchange of fire stretched over the entire length of the Line, it was heaviest in the areas west of Bint Jubeil and in the Sheba'a farms area. Hizbollah targeted IDF positions and Israeli towns south of the Blue Line. Israel retaliated with ground, air and sea attacks. In addition to air strikes on Hizbollah positions, the IDF also targeted numerous roads and bridges in southern Lebanon. The IDF has stated that those attacks were to "prevent Hizbollah from transferring the abducted soldiers".

At least one IDF tank and an IDF platoon crossed into Lebanon in the area of the Hizbollah attack in an

attempt to rescue the captured soldiers. An explosive device detonated under the tank, killing four more IDF soldiers. An eighth IDF soldier was reportedly killed in the fighting that ensued during an attempt to retrieve the four bodies. It appears that the incursion was localized; the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has no reports at this point of additional IDF incursions into Lebanese territory.

In the afternoon of 12 July local time, the Government of Lebanon requested UNIFIL to broker a ceasefire. Israel responded that a ceasefire would be contingent upon the return of the captured soldiers.

The Secretary-General has condemned Hizbollah's attack, which resulted in the capture of two IDF soldiers, and has called for the soldiers' immediate and unconditional release. He has called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

In the morning of 13 July, Hizbollah launched numerous rocket attacks on Nahariya, 10 kilometres south of the Blue Line, reportedly killing one Israeli civilian and wounding scores more. Later in the day, two rockets struck the city of Haifa causing some damage to buildings and injuries to several persons. The IDF responded with the bombing of Hizbollah positions, attacks on the Beirut international airport, the Hizbollah-affiliated Al-Manar television station and two air bases. The attacks have forced the closure of the Beirut airport. It has further been reported that, late on Thursday, Israel attacked the Beirut airport for a second time, setting the fuel depots on fire, as well a southern suburb of Beirut. Israeli planes also dropped leaflets across Lebanon warning the population to avoid areas known for Hizbollah's presence.

Intermittent exchanges of fire from both sides continue along the Blue Line. The number of those killed and wounded on both sides is disturbingly high, although it cannot be reliably confirmed at this time. Based on available information, eight IDF soldiers have been killed and several wounded and two Israeli civilians have been killed and dozens more wounded. One Lebanese army soldier has been reported killed in the attack on an air base, in addition to the more than 50 civilians who have been reported killed and scores more wounded.

The Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for Lebanon, Mr. Pedersen, has expressed his alarm at Israel's heavy attacks and the escalation that has taken place across the Blue Line. He has also voiced deepest concern that the Israeli military is enforcing an air and sea blockade, which will increase the hardship of the civilian population in Lebanon.

UNIFIL has reported several instances of firing close to its positions, including an ammunitions depot near Naqoura, by the IDF. The mission also reported one instance of Hizbollah firing close from one of UNIFIL's positions towards Israel. No United Nations personnel have been injured and no equipment has been damaged.

Since the beginning of hostilities on 12 July, UNIFIL military personnel have remained confined to their positions, and during the heaviest exchanges of fire they have had to take shelter in bunkers. On 12 July, the IDF warned UNIFIL that any person — including United Nations personnel — moving close to the Blue Line would be shot at. Due to the continued firing, UNIFIL has not been able to carry out its regular vehicle and helicopter patrols along the Blue Line. UNIFIL's ability to monitor developments in the area of operation, and especially along the Blue Line, has consequently been very limited. Today, UNIFIL has tried to carry out one patrol in the rear of its area of operation, away from the Blue Line, etween Marjayoun and Naqoura, but has not been able to complete the patrol so far. It is the Mission's intention to increase patrolling as and where possible.

UNIFIL is in contact with the parties, urging them to exercise restraint. In order to strengthen its efforts to restore calm and to provide basic humanitarian and medical assistance to the civilian population, it is important that UNIFIL be able to resume full operations in the area of operations without danger to its personnel. Some Lebanese civilians, displaced from their homes in the south, have tried to move north and cross the Litani, but have been stopped from doing so by the destruction of the bridges. Some Lebanese civilians are approaching UNIFIL with requests for shelter and other assistance.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Guéhenno for his briefing.

The Security Council will now hear a briefing by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

**Mr. Gambari**: The Secretary-General is deeply alarmed at the escalation of violence in Lebanon and

Israel. Parts of Lebanon are under blockade and heavy Israeli military action, while Israel is being subjected to indiscriminate attacks by Hizbollah forces. Escalations have occurred on both sides. We are particularly alarmed at the suffering that has been unleashed on civilians on both sides.

The Secretary-General condemns all actions which target civilians or which unduly endanger them owing to their disproportionate or indiscriminate character. The parties should be reminded that, under the law of armed conflict, attacks must not be directed against civilian objects. In particular, they have an obligation to exercise caution and to respect the proportionality principle in all military operations so as to prevent unnecessary suffering, particularly among the civilian population.

The Secretary-General has been working ceaselessly on this evolving and dangerous situation. He calls on all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and international agreements, and he has been in close consultations with leaders around the world to find an urgent solution to the crisis, to urge restraint and to prevent the situation from spiralling even further out of control. We hope that the parties heed that counsel, and that regional players who have influence will do likewise. Reckless and dangerous actions will only lead to further bloodshed and further instability, inflaming an already highly volatile region.

In this regard we must give support to the Government of Lebanon, and we are encouraged by the recent statement by the Lebanese Cabinet which reaffirms its commitment to international resolutions and respect for the Blue Line. We are emphasizing to all concerned that a qualitative escalation of the conflict is in no one's interest and that the space for diplomatic initiatives is quickly closing. All parties should do their utmost to ensure that that space remains open.

In the light of these alarming developments, the Secretary-General has decided to send a mission to the Middle East to exercise good offices and help defuse the major crisis in the region. The team is led by his Special Adviser, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, and comprises two other senior United Nations political officers, Mr. Alvaro de Soto and Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen.

The mission will endeavour to contribute to deescalating the situation by conveying the Secretary-General's call for the release of the captured soldiers, for restraint by all parties and for a ceasefire. All parties will also be encouraged to use their influence to defuse the situation. In all instances, the team will also emphasize the message of the Secretary-General to respect international humanitarian law and to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The mission arrives in Cairo today, where it will conduct meetings with Egyptian officials and hold consultations with the foreign ministers of the League of Arab States. The team will then travel to Israel, Lebanon and Syria, and other places as may be deemed necessary by the Secretary-General. The team will report to the Secretary-General upon its return to New York. I believe, of course, that the Secretariat will continue to keep the Security Council constantly briefed on further developments.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Gambari for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

**Mr. Mahmoud** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, Mr. President, to pay special tribute to the historic traditions and ties between my country, Lebanon, and yours, France, as well as to France's traditional policy of defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Lebanon.

The Security Council is meeting today in the shadow of the widespread and barbaric aggression being waged by Israel up until this very moment against my country, Lebanon. That aggression is destroying Lebanon's infrastructure and causing the deaths of innocent civilians in full view of the international community, which is today called upon to curb Israel's aggression and immediately bring it to an end.

The ongoing operations of destruction and killing that have been undertaken by Israel since 12 July will not resolve the problem; they will further complicate it. The Israeli Government has held the Lebanese Government responsible for certain acts, even though the Lebanese Government issued a statement on 12 July whereby it declared that it was not aware of the incident that occurred on the Blue Line on that date, that it did not take responsibility for it and that it did not endorse that act.

The Israeli forces have launched widespread military operations, deliberately bombing vital installations. Most major bridges have been destroyed. Fuel storage tanks at electrical power plants have been destroyed. The three runways at Beirut International Airport have been destroyed. Many civilian installations and residential buildings have been destroyed, causing the death of many Lebanese civilians, causing grave material losses and stranding innocent tourists. They subsequently bombed and disabled the airfields of Rayak and Qulayat. An air and sea blockade has been imposed against Lebanon to isolate it from its surroundings and to cut off all means of communication between it and the outside world.

Israeli forces have not shied away from targeting innocent civilians, thereby violating all human rights — most importantly the right to life. Their forces have bombed peaceful villages and residential areas, bringing homes down on the heads of their inhabitants. More than 60 martyrs have fallen to date, most of whom were civilians. Hundreds of persons have been injured.

My Government condemns and denounces this Israeli aggression, which is a flagrant violation of all international resolutions, laws, norms and conventions. I need not explain to the Council who is the victim and who the aggressor. What Israel is committing is an act of aggression and devastation aimed at bringing Lebanon to its knees and at undermining it by any means.

In its statement of 13 July, the Lebanese Government once again stressed its responsibility for the protection of the nation and its citizens and for their safety and security. It also affirmed its right and duty to exercise its sovereignty over all of its territory, as well as to take its national decisions freely, both internally and externally. For more than a year, the Lebanese have worked tirelessly to conclude the efforts aimed at regaining independence and rebuilding institutions, in cooperation with the international community and with full commitment to the resolutions of the Security Council. Israel's aggression hampers the efforts made towards fostering democracy. It also undermines Lebanon's sovereignty as it endeavours to exercise its authority over its entire territory.

My Government welcomes the initiative of the Secretary-General to dispatch a high-level delegation that will work to reduce tensions, re-establish stability, call for respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and address the root causes of the current conflict.

Israel's disregard of the calls made by the Lebanese Government expressing its complete willingness to negotiate through the United Nations and other parties to resolve the developments that have taken place, the consequences of those developments and the reasons that led to them is incontrovertible evidence of the intention of the Israelis to escalate the situation.

The international community, as represented by the Security Council, is called upon to take an immediate clear decision calling for an immediate comprehensive ceasefire, the lifting of the air and sea blockade imposed against Lebanon and an end to Israeli aggression. The Council is also called upon to take up the root causes and consequences of the current crisis along the Blue Line.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Gillerman** (Israel): Let me take you back, Mr. President, to a warm summer's day in Beirut 32 years ago, exactly on a very significant day for you and your people: 14 July 1974. I want to describe the scene to you and to my Lebanese colleague. Cafés and bars bustling with young people, beaches filled with happy holiday-makers — the Switzerland of the Middle East. How different that scene is from the one on Beirut's streets today, 32 years later. But that difference did not start this week or last year. The difference started only one year after the scene I just described, in 1975, when the Lebanese began their long descent into oppression, depression and terror. Lebanon is a country that has been held hostage for more than 32 years by tyrants from the north and terrorists in the south, a country whose fun-loving, business-minded, entrepreneurial and liberal population has been tormented by decades of oppression, sectarian strife, fundamentalist violence, religious conflict, Syrian control, political assassinations, terror and full-fledged civil war.

In May 2000, Israel took the painful and politically difficult decision to fully withdraw from southern Lebanon, having been compelled a few years earlier to establish a security zone there in order to prevent terrorist attacks and rocket shelling from Lebanon into Israeli towns and villages. The

Security Council acknowledged Israel's complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon and its full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978) in a presidential statement on 18 June 2000 (S/PRST/2000/21).

That was Lebanon's moment of truth. Would its Government look inward and free its people from the stranglehold of terror? Or would it allow its territory to become a base from which Hizbollah terrorists would launch attacks against Israeli civilians? Tragically, the Lebanese Government chose the latter.

The Lebanese Government got a second chance after the partial implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), which resulted in the withdrawal of most Syrian forces from Lebanese territory. Again the Council and the entire world were waiting to see how Lebanon would respond to this historic opportunity. Yet again, unfortunately, the Lebanese Government chose to succumb to terror rather than vanquish it, to let its southern region be occupied by terrorism, rather than disarm it, and to relinquish control over its country rather than exercise its full sovereignty. Seldom before has the description of a people as never missing an opportunity to miss an opportunity been so apt. Lebanon, sadly, did not heed the demands of the international community and did not obey the repeated resolutions of the Security Council. Today, sadly, the Lebanese people are bearing the cost of that inaction and ineptitude.

Two days ago, Hizbollah terrorists, operating with impunity in southern Lebanon, unleashed a sudden and unprovoked attack into Israeli territory. Scores of Katyusha rockets rained down on Israeli towns and villages, causing many civilian casualties. In this midst of this horrific assault, Hizbollah terrorists infiltrated Israel, killing a number of soldiers and kidnapping two more, who were taken deep into the terrorist stronghold of southern Lebanon. Israel had no choice but to react, as would, indeed, any other responsible democratic Government. Having shown unparalleled restraint for six years while bearing the brunt of countless attacks, Israel had to respond to this absolutely unprovoked assault, whose scale and depth was unprecedented in recent years.

Let me emphasize this indisputable fact: Israel's actions were in direct response to an act of war from Lebanon. Although Israel holds the Government of Lebanon responsible, it is concentrating its response carefully, mainly on Hizbollah strongholds, positions and infrastructure. The hundreds of Katyusha rockets fired from Lebanon in the last few days demonstrate the magnitude of the immense arsenal of rockets and other weapons that Hizbollah has amassed over the last few years, a danger we have repeatedly warned against. Many of the long-range missiles that have hit Israeli towns, including Nahariyya, Safad, Rosh Pina and the port city of Haifa, were launched from private homes with families residing inside, where a special room was designated as a launching pad with a family playing host to the missile. That is yet another example of the cynical and brutal way the Hizbollah organization uses civilians as human shields, with complete disregard for human life.

Over the last 48 hours, more than 500 Katyushas and mortar shells were fired into the northern part of Israel, killing two civilians and wounding hundreds more, among them women and children. Israeli civilians and eight soldiers have been killed, hundreds have been wounded. It is very important for the international community to understand that while Hizbollah executes this vicious terrorism, it is merely the finger on the blood-stained, long-reaching arms of Syria and Iran. Hizbollah, together with Hamas, Syria and Iran, comprise the world's new and ominous axis of terror, an infamous club, the entry fee to which is the blood of innocents and the terrorizing of the entire world.

Membership in this club requires an unfathomable capacity for evil. The President of Iran has repeatedly denied the Holocaust while gleefully preparing the next one. Many of the long-range missiles fired into Israel in recent days were Iranian missiles, made by the same regime that is now trying to possess nuclear weapons, the same regime that is funding Hizbollah to the sum of $100 million a year.

Do we dare to ask ourselves how many families in Lebanon today are being prepared to house dirty bombs and other weapons of mass destruction, courtesy of Iran?

Syria, another member of this club, is a well-known protector and financer of terrorist organizations, playing host to them in its capital, Damascus. The Syrian Government, which still regards Lebanon as southern Syria, works ceaselessly to undermine all efforts towards a peaceful future in the region.

Lebanon is today occupied by terror, whether in the south where it is directed at Israel or in Beirut where it kills opponents of Syria and former prime ministers. The real occupying power in Lebanon is terror, terror instigated by Hizbollah but initiated, funded and perpetrated by Syria and Iran.

The Lebanese Government, having missed so many chances in the past, at such a horrendous cost to its people, today has another chance to free itself from the stranglehold of terror, another chance to release itself from the evil control of Syria and the deadly influence of Iran, and deploy its forces the south, exercising its sovereignty over a free Lebanon.

There are words that speak far louder and clearer than anything I can voice today. These are voices of Lebanese: brave, patriotic Lebanese parliamentarians and ministers who, just over the last two days, have cried out to all of us from the brink of the abyss in their beloved country.

Let me quote some of these courageous statements. There are the words of Lebanon's Communications Minister, Mr. Marwan Hamadeh, who only yesterday said that "Damascus gives the orders, Iran supplies the equipment, Israel reacts and Lebanon is the victim". Or there are the words of Elias Atallah, a Lebanese politician representing the majority of its parliamentary members,

> "We welcome any Arab and international support, but strongly oppose any enforced involvement of Lebanon by regional players' considerations" — reference to Syria and Iran — that are not within the interests of the Lebanese people for the sole attempt to achieve opportunistic benefits at the expense of the Lebanese people. The Syrian regime indulges itself in teaching Lebanon and Palestine lessons according to its own interests through these peoples. Why do those who always protect their regime express understanding of its reasons and preferences and do not express any understanding of Lebanon's reasons and preferences?"

Or, there are the words of an unnamed Lebanese minister who said — again, only yesterday — "The Hizbollah has not only kidnapped two Israeli soldiers; it has taken the whole of Lebanon hostage".

With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to make a personal appeal to my esteemed Lebanese colleague. Your Excellency, you know deep down that, if you could, you would add your own brave voice to those voices of your brave compatriots and colleagues. You know deep in your heart that, if you could, you would be sitting here right next to me, right now, because you know that we are doing the right thing and that, if we succeed, Lebanon will be the beneficiary.

I believe that most members around this table, as well as many others in this Chamber, including our neighbours, realize that reality.

The Security Council and the international community have a duty today to help the Lebanese people achieve the goal of a free, prosperous, democratic Lebanon. The sad and tormented life of that war-torn land has today entered another sad chapter in its history. It is up to every one of us to help write that chapter to ensure that this opportunity is seized, not only for the benefit of the Lebanese and the Israeli peoples, but for the sake of generations to come.

**Mr. Dolgov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The situation between Israel and Lebanon continues to intensify dangerously. The conflict began on 12 July with a border incident caused by the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers and by the firing of rockets into Israeli territory by militarized units of the Lebanese Hizbollah movement, and it is escalating into a major military conflagration that could have grave consequences for Lebanon, for the Middle East region as a whole and for international peace. The spiral of violence in the region is growing ever tighter.

Retaliatory action by Israel — troop incursions into Lebanese territory, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and the air and sea blockade of Lebanese territory — has resulted in major casualties and suffering among the peaceable population. Hizbollah has begun to fire rockets on Israeli cities, including Haifa; these too are inflicting harm on perfectly innocent people. All of this takes place in parallel with ongoing Israeli army operations in the Palestinian territories, where innocent people die daily.

Russia strongly condemns the kidnapping of the soldiers and the firing on Israeli territory. But we view Israel's military action as a disproportionate and inappropriate use of force that threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and peace and security throughout the region.

In the light of this situation, it is essential that urgent steps be taken to halt the military escalation. We urge Israel to end its incursions into Lebanon and its destruction of civilian infrastructure on Lebanese territory, and to lift the blockade against that country. Experience in the Middle East and, indeed, past practice in the resolution of other conflicts show that security problems cannot be solved by armed force.

For its part, Hizbollah must refrain from actions against Israel, which pose a threat to the interests of its own country as well. It must release the Israeli soldiers, halt its rocket attacks on Israeli territory and respect the Blue Line. We expect the Lebanese Government and other parties to provide all possible assistance in resolving these issues.

Russia, for its part, is taking active steps to achieve a ceasefire and to steer the conflict towards a political settlement. On 13 July, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, met with Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Prime Minister Siniora of Lebanon, Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit of Egypt and Foreign Minister Motaki of Iran. Russia expressed its support for the Secretary-General's decision to dispatch a special mission to the region with the task of entering into contact with the regional parties and finding a way to deescalate the conflict. In the light of the acute deterioration of the situation in the Middle East, Russia has decided to send Mr. Sergei Yakovlev, special representative of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the region for talks with the interested parties, our Quartet partners, international mediators and the United Nations special mission.

**Nana Effah-Apenteng** (Ghana): At the outset, let me express the appreciation of my delegation to Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and to Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for their updates on the situation in the Middle East, regarding the ongoing Israeli military operations in Lebanon in response to the latest rocket attacks launched by the Hizbollah group. The repeated violations of the Blue Line by Hizbollah have been denounced consistently by the Security Council, and we note that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has done its best to prevent the situation from getting out of control.

We further welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to send a three-man delegation to ascertain what can be done to end this unfortunate turn of events. We hope that the visit will succeed in bringing an end to the violence.

We also take this opportunity to reiterate the call for the immediate release of all kidnapped Israeli soldiers; the same applies to the Palestinian parliamentarians who have been abducted by Israel.

Yesterday, Ghana voted in favour of the draft resolution on the Middle East (S/2006/508) that the Security Council failed to adopt, much to the regret of those who see in the dangerous escalation of violence in the Middle East a real threat of a regional war with unpredictable consequences. Once unleashed, force is difficult to control. Worse still, its casualties are frequently innocent civilians and it involves a general deterioration in the humanitarian situation. That was true of Gaza, and we are hearing of similar displacements in southern Lebanon. Furthermore, mistrust grows, positions harden and the prospects for a diplomatic solution recede, to the frustration of all.

The Security Council is fully aware of all of these dangers and has repeatedly called for restraint on both sides of the Middle East peace divide. Beyond that, the Council has repeatedly reminded the parties of their commitments under international law and international humanitarian law.

Against that background, the widespread bombardment of vital Lebanese infrastructure, including the airport, highways and several other targets, in order to enforce a total blockade on a sovereign State is not acceptable. Diplomacy was hardly given a chance in spite of the well-known difficulties faced by the Lebanese Government in disbanding the militia and extending control over all of its territory in full compliance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

While some success has been achieved through the strategy of containment, including the deployment of peacekeeping missions, not much has been achieved in addressing the underlying causes of the conflict in the Middle East. Objectively, the Middle East crisis revolves around the Palestinian question, which boils down to the achievement of an independent and viable State for the Palestinians within internationally recognized boundaries.

We therefore call for an immediate cessation of hostilities between Israel and the various armed groups and for a speedy resumption of the peace negotiations without preconditions.

These are dangerous times, and the Security Council must live up to its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security by refocusing its energies and attention on seeking a just and lasting solution to the Middle East question.

**Mr. Mayoral** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina is extremely concerned at the crisis between Israel and Lebanon and at the serious events that have taken place in the Gaza Strip in recent weeks. Those two crises, as we see it, have the potential to destabilize the entire Middle East region.

We therefore deem it essential for all parties involved to take urgent measures to put an end to the escalation of violence and to resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation.

Within that framework, we welcome the decision taken by the Secretary-General to send a team of three special envoys to the region to help find a solution to the present conflict. We believe that all parties must cooperate fully with Ambassadors Nambiar, Roed-Larsen and De Soto.

Argentina condemns the Hizbollah attack that took place on the morning of 12 July during which two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped and others were wounded or killed. We wish to reiterate here that the abducted soldiers must be released immediately and unconditionally.

My country also condemns once again the launching of Katyusha rockets from Lebanese territory into Israel. We would note here that as a result of one of those attacks, on 13 July Mónica Lerer de Saidman, an Argentine citizen, died in the city of Nahariya, in northern Israel. My Government extends its deepest condolences to her family and to the families of Israeli and Lebanese victims, as well as victims of other nationalities.

The Lebanese Government must assume its responsibilities in the south of the country, taking the necessary measures to put an end to violations along the Blue Line, on the Lebanese side. We reiterate our appeal that the resolutions of the Council be implemented without any further delay, in particular resolution 425 (1978) and 1559 (2004), as well as other subsequent resolutions.

Argentina does not deny the fact that Israel has the right to defend itself against foreign attack. However, we also believe that it must do so in accordance with international law and in particular with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

My country is extremely concerned at the Israeli military actions that have taken place in recent days, and in particular at the excessive use of force, the imposition of collective punishment, the destruction of civilian infrastructure — in particular the destruction of airports, power stations, bridges and roads — as well as attacks against populated areas that endanger the lives of innocent civilians, and the imposition of a sea, air and land blockade against Lebanon. Continued violations on the part of Israel along the Blue Line are also a source of concern for us. We believe that those practices must cease immediately.

My country, Argentina, was deeply perturbed to hear of the death of four Brazilian citizens, including two children, in the city of Srifa. All four, who belonged to the same family, were victims of Israeli military action, which we condemn. We believe that this represents further proof of the consequences of a disproportionate response that has led to the loss of innocent lives among the civilian population. We extend our condolences to the family members of the victims and to the Government of Brazil.

Given that the crisis has the potential to destabilize the entire region, it is essential for the parties to act with the utmost caution and avoid taking any measures that might increase levels of tension and violence. We call on the leaders in the Middle East and those of the countries with influence on the parties to do everything in their power to contain the conflict and to contribute positively to the release of the detained soldiers and to putting an end to military operations and terrorist attacks.

This crisis makes it clear once again that it is vital that we renew our quest for a lasting peace in the Middle East before it is too late and before the door is opened to a regional conflict of unforeseeable consequences for all of humankind. Such an endeavour should be based on Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

**Mr. Bolton** (United States of America): In recent days and weeks, we have seen an outbreak of violence in the Middle East, sparked by attacks and kidnappings which Hamas and Hizbollah carried out against Israel. Events continue to develop even as we speak. Hizbollah's incursions across the Blue line on 12 July were a deliberate and premeditated provocation intended to undermine regional stability and are contrary to the interests of both the Lebanese and Israeli peoples.

We unequivocally condemn the kidnapping by Hizbollah, a terrorist organization, of two Israeli soldiers and call for their immediate and unconditional release. Provocations across the Blue Line by terrorist groups highlight the urgent need for full and immediate compliance by Syria and Hizbollah with relevant Security Council resolutions, including 1559 (2004), 1583 (2005), 1655 (2006) and 1680 (2006).

The international community has made clear its desire to see the central authority of the Government of Lebanon extended throughout the country. In this context, we underscore the importance of the Security Council President's statement of 18 June 2000 and the Secretary-General's conclusion that, as of 16 June 2000, Israel had withdrawn all its forces from Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), and met the requirements defined in the Secretary-General's 22 May 2000 report.

As President Bush said yesterday, we are very concerned about the fragile democracy in Lebanon. While we have been working very hard with partners to strengthen democracy in Lebanon, we are also making clear that the democratic aspirations of the Lebanese people must not be undermined by the irresponsible and destabilizing actions of Hizbollah.

We have repeatedly made clear to Lebanon and Syria our serious concern about the presence of terrorist groups on their soil and the periodic attacks against Israel from groups and individuals in southern Lebanon. All militias in Lebanon, including Hizbollah, must disarm and disband immediately, and the Lebanese Government must extend and exercise its sole and exclusive control over all Lebanese territory.

President Bush has made clear that Syria and Iran must be held to account for supporting regional terrorism and their role in the current crisis. Syria provides safe haven to the militant wing of Hamas and provides material support to Hizbollah, which also maintains an active presence in Syria. Iran's extensive sponsorship and financial and other support of Hizbollah is well known and has been ongoing for decades. No reckoning with Hizbollah will be adequate without a reckoning with its principal State sponsors of terror. We call on Syria and Iran to cease their sponsorship and support of terrorist groups, in particular Hizbollah and Hamas. For the third time in two weeks we call again on Syria to arrest Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, who currently lives in Damascus. There is no excuse for a Member State of the United Nations to continue to knowingly harbour a recognized terrorist.

The Secretary-General's decision to send a senior-level team to the region is a development that is welcomed by my Government. We also are engaged with the primary parties and other concerned leaders to help restore calm and achieve a resolution to the crisis. In fact, senior United States officials have been in the region and are in Jerusalem today for meetings.

All parties in the region must accept their responsibilities for maintaining security and stability. We urge all parties to accept the principle that Governments must exercise sovereign control over their territories. The United States remains firmly committed to working with others not only to resolve the present situation but toward building longer-term peace and stability in the region.

**Mr. Al-Qahtani** (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this urgent Council meeting to debate the continuing Israeli military aggression against Lebanon and its people. I also wish to thank Mr. Guéhenno and Mr. Gambari for their briefings on the latest disturbing developments in the region.

Over the past few days, and even as I speak, we have been witnessing a barbaric military campaign by Israel's military forces against Lebanon and its people. That has led to the death of dozens of civilians, including women and children, and to serious damage to the infrastructure of that country — without justification.

While we recognize the right of all States, including Lebanon, to defend themselves, the waging of a wide-spread military campaign directly targeting civilians and hitting their infrastructure, such as in the current campaign by the Israeli forces, can in no way be consonant with that objective. To the contrary, it

seems that the holding of the two Israeli soldiers is being used as a pretext to bring destruction and instability to the region.

The alleged right of Israel to self-defense ends when the Security Council takes the necessary measures to maintain international peace and security. Will the Security Council be allowed to stop Israel's aggression against this wounded country? It is premeditated aggression; it is flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of all international norms. We must put an end to it forthwith.

Lebanon today is a rare successful experiment in democracy; it has borne fruit. If we wish to protect that experiment, if we wish to allow Lebanon to fully exercise its authority over all its territory, we must stop any act that may destabilize the country and harm democracy. The fact that the Israeli Government holds the Lebanese Government responsible for the abduction and holding of the two Israeli soldiers, even though it had no knowledge of that action, is a grave development and is in no way proper justification for waging the military campaign against Lebanon.

We call on the two parties to show restraint and not to escalate, and certainly not to target civilians. We hope that these incidents will not cause further deterioration of the situation. The region cannot take any more tension beyond what it currently suffers. At any rate, the Security Council must immediately take appropriate measures to put an end to this barbaric aggression in order to protect Lebanon and its people. We cannot allow Lebanon to be brought to its knees.

**Mr. Liu Zhengmin** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank Under-Secretaries-General Guéhenno and Gambari for their briefings, which were extremely helpful for us to gain a timely understanding of the crisis between Lebanon and Israel.

In its recent stage the situation between Lebanon and Israel has been made drastically worse, which causes us grave concern and worry. China is against any actions that destabilize that region and calls on all parties concerned to strictly respect the Blue Line and relevant United Nations resolutions.

We denounce the armed aggression by Israel against Lebanon. The Israeli military forces have used disproportionate force and have caused massive destruction of infrastructure in Lebanon. That has seriously affected the daily life of local residents and has caused large numbers of civilian causalities. It violates the sovereignty of Lebanon and has caused a grave humanitarian crisis. We demand that Israel stop its current military actions and lift the air, sea and land blockade against Lebanon.

At the same time we are against the practice of Hizbollah militias who cross the borders to attack Israel and launch rockets on Israeli cities. We call on Hizbollah to release the abducted Israeli soldiers at an early date.

At present the situation in the Middle East is extremely precarious and volatile. Imprudent actions by any party may set off the powder keg and lead to catastrophic consequences — which no one wishes to see. History has told us that violence for violence, and a tooth for a tooth, will lead us nowhere. We strongly call on all parties concerned to exercise the utmost restraint and maintain calm and to resolve the current crisis through diplomatic means.

We have noted that Secretary-General Annan has decided to send a special group on an urgent trip for mediation and brokering in the Middle East. We support his decision and hope that the special group will live up to the great expectations placed on it and bring us good news of peace.

**Mr. Kitaoka** (Japan): I too wish to join my colleagues in thanking Under-Secretaries-General Guéhenno and Gambari for their informative briefings on the latest developments in the Middle East, focusing on the situation in southern Lebanon.

The Middle East has seen continuing deterioration over the past several months. The attacks by Hizbollah across the Blue Line, the abduction of the two Israeli soldiers and the ensuing developments have further destabilized the already fragile situation in the region, which is extremely worrying.

Japan strongly condemns the attacks by Hizbollah, which are a blatant breach of relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the abduction of the Israeli soldiers. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of the soldiers.

Japan is deeply concerned that these developments of the past few days will have a negative impact on the efforts for peace in the region as a whole. We therefore call upon all parties to exercise

maximum self-restraint in order to avoid further deterioration of the situation.

Japan acknowledges the legitimate security concerns of Israel. Having said that, we strongly urge Israel to refrain from excessive use of force and, in particular, from actions that endanger the civilian population and the infrastructure, as was the case with the Israeli military operations of 13 July, which caused many civilian casualties and the destruction of airport facilities in Lebanon.

Japan concurs in the belief that political stability in Lebanon is critical to peace and stability in the Middle East. We therefore commend and support the efforts of the Lebanese Government towards full sovereignty and the expansion of political independence. We recognize that the disarming and disbanding of Hizbollah is a matter of crucial importance that directly relates to the expansion of control by the Government of Lebanon over all of its territory.

The recent events underscore the importance of achieving those goals. We hope that the Government of Lebanon will commit itself to a continuous, sustained effort to reach these goals, and we call on the Government to make every effort to secure the release of the Israeli soldiers.

It is our view that overcoming the present crisis in the region requires the international community to continue its cooperation in tandem. From that perspective, Japan welcomes the decision of the Secretary-General to dispatch a team led by his Special Political Adviser, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, to the Middle East to help defuse the current major crisis in the region.

In conclusion, let me note that Prime Minister Koizumi has been on a visit to Israel, Palestine and Jordan from 11 July to today. The Prime Minister made the following remarks in a joint media conference with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert after their meeting.

> "I realize that it is an extremely hard time for the Israeli people, who are trying to cope with the incident that occurred on [12 July], in addition to the difficult situation regarding the Gaza Strip, which has continued for quite some time. It is of greater importance, however, to have a rational reaction based on a far-sighted recognition of the importance of achieving coexistence and mutual prosperity in the medium and long term, rather than taking an eye-for-an-eye approach."

Japan strongly hopes that the leaders in the region will employ wisdom and judgement in addressing the current critical situation.

**Sir Emyr Jones Parry** (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom is gravely concerned by the escalation of this crisis, which poses a serious threat for Israel and Lebanon and for the wider security of the region. The United Kingdom is committed to helping to resolve this crisis. Foreign Secretary Beckett has spoken to her Israeli colleague, and the Prime Minister has spoken to the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Siniora. We appreciate the pressures that both Governments are under at this particularly difficult time.

Our priority must be to calm the situation, support the moderates on all sides and create conditions for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution. Focusing on finding fault will not help us in that endeavour. We urge all parties to do all that they can to address this crisis and to prevent the situation from worsening.

Prime Minister Blair has also spoken to the Secretary-General, and we fully support his decision to send a mission to the region to try to calm the situation and assist efforts for a diplomatic solution. We also fully support the mission of the European Union High Representative, who will be travelling to the region early next week. We hope that the two missions can coordinate closely on the ground and contribute to a solution.

We reiterate our call for the urgent release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers and for an end to attacks on Israeli towns and cities. We urge all those countries with influence over Hizbollah, in particular Syria and Iran, to play their part.

Israel has every right to act in self-defence. But it must exercise restraint and ensure that its actions are proportionate and measured, conform to international law and avoid civilian death and suffering. Disproportionate action will only escalate an already dangerous situation.

This crisis underscores the need for the full and sustainable implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), including the importance of the Government of

Lebanon exercising and being able to exercise its full authority throughout Lebanese territory.

**Mr. Ikouebe** (Congo) (*spoke in French*): As it participates in today's debate, my delegation hopes very much that the Council will take full account of what is at stake here and will send the right message to the protagonists in this crisis in order to restore peace, while stressing negotiation and dialogue. For, clearly, today we have a very dangerous escalation.

In considering this item, my delegation still recalls those moving words of the father of the Israeli soldier who was kidnapped in Palestine a few weeks ago — a father who hoped this tragedy was not going to lead to more misfortune for innocent people in Palestine and in Israel. He did not know how right he was, nor, undoubtedly, did he imagine that the tragedy would spill over the borders. That is why we condemn all acts of violence, whoever the authors and whatever the motivation. Above all, we deplore the factors that triggered the immediate crisis — namely, the rocket attacks on Israel by members of Hizbollah and the abduction and detention of Israeli soldiers. All of those acts are clearly provocative and only serve, ultimately, to exacerbate tension, thereby making Lebanon even more fragile and endangering the lives of the civilian population.

But we condemn equally firmly the disproportionate reprisals by the Israeli army, which did not hesitate to bomb Beirut intensively, to launch incursions into southern Lebanon and to impose a land, sea and air blockade of Lebanon. Those, too, are acts of war that endanger the civilian population and that destroy socio-economic infrastructure and seriously weaken the Lebanese authorities, who are embarked upon a national dialogue that we have encouraged.

Nevertheless, this is not the time for condemnation. We need to act quickly to ease tensions in order to return to a political and diplomatic solution. This is why my delegation welcomes the initiative taken by the Secretary-General to send a high-level delegation to the region; we also encourage all national and regional initiatives. We also request that, in accordance with the wishes of the Lebanese Government, an immediate ceasefire be declared, followed by serious negotiations on all pending issues: release of prisoners and detainees, implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions relating to this situation and, in particular, the disarmament and disbanding of militias, normalization of relations between Lebanon and its neighbours and respect for the Blue Line.

My delegation reaffirms that only dialogue and negotiation can make it possible for the States of the region, with the resolute support of the international community, to achieve a just and lasting peace on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principles of international law.

Of course, the response will be that there is nothing new here. But the alternative is not having very positive results. We do not believe that there can be any resolution through the firing of rockets against civilian populations, the abduction of soldiers or the bombing of airports. Such actions will never lead to the release of prisoners or to the dismantling of militias, still less to the establishment of a just and lasting peace.

**Mr. Mahiga** (United Republic of Tanzania): We thank Mr. Guéhenno and Mr. Gambari for their update briefings on the crisis between Israel and Lebanon. We, like other delegations, are alarmed by the sudden and escalating fighting across the Blue Line involving Hizbollah and the Israel Defense Forces, which is spreading to other parts of Lebanon.

We condemn the attacks sparked by Hizbollah across the Blue Line and the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers on 12 July. That was a blatant breach of Security Council resolutions and a violation of the line separating the two countries. We deplore the deaths of and injuries to civilians, which are continuing, and call for a halt to the extensive destruction of property and infrastructure in Lebanon.

We are gravely concerned by the intensity of the fighting and the disproportionate use of force. Israeli forces have targeted bridges, fired at Beirut's airport, setting fuel tanks on fire, and struck the main Beirut-Damascus road. Israel is continuing to strike Lebanon by land, sea and air, and has imposed an air and naval blockade aimed, with devastating consequences, at civilian life which is having a destabilizing impact on the entire region.

On the other hand, Hizbollah has fired volleys of rockets targeting population centres in northern Israel, including Nahariya and the port city of Haifa, which represents a major and unprecedented escalation of the crisis across the Blue Line.

The situation is definitely spiralling out of control and we risk losing sight of the issues at stake as a result of the kidnapping of the two soldiers in an already volatile situation. The chances for their release are much greater through negotiations than through the use of excessive force.

We urge the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to stop the hostilities so as to allow mediation efforts to resolve the crisis. This is urgent; there is a similar situation in the Gaza Strip that remains unresolved, despite the extensive use of force there.

The current security situation demonstrates once again the urgency of the call for the Lebanese Government to extend its control over all of its territory and prevent attacks across the Blue Line. Over the past 12 months, Lebanon has gone through one political crisis after another. This latest development renders the situation more volatile. There is a need for decisive international action to help Lebanon stabilize itself.

The parties should be encouraged to abstain from acts that constitute a violation of international law, international humanitarian law or relevant Security Council resolutions. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon must be respected in the context of a comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem.

We are concerned that the cycle of violence in the region does not seem to be abating and is causing misery to ordinary civilians. We appeal to leaders in the region and to the wider international community to take immediate, concerted action to resolve the conflict. In this regard, we commend the speedy action of the Secretary-General in sending envoys to the troubled region to defuse the situation and chart a solution to the ongoing crisis. We are also encouraged by the prompt diplomatic efforts being taken by Arab countries such as Egypt to find a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Finally, we would like to stress that the cessation of hostilities as a prerequisite for political negotiations is the key to bringing about a durable solution to the crisis.

**Mr. Pereyra Plasencia** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru strongly deplores the escalation of violence and the loss of innocent human life in the Middle East. It is essential that the parties involved immediately cease all belligerent actions so that a climate of peace can be restored in the region and dialogue and negotiation can be pursued. That will require a ceasefire and the release of the abducted Israeli soldiers, as well as of the elected Palestinian Authority officials who were recently illegally detained.

This escalation of the crisis and its expansion into Lebanon was provoked by Hizbollah, considered a terrorist organization, which crossed the Blue Line to attack a military post, killing eight Israeli soldiers and taking two hostage, and launching rockets that claimed civilian lives. Such aggressive action by any State is unacceptable, and in this case it provoked a military response by Israel in the State of Lebanon. That action further worsened the cycle of violence in the Middle East, which had already intensified following a similar action by the Hamas-led Government of the Palestinian Authority in which it attacked, through a tunnel, an Israeli military post, killing two members of the Israel Defense Forces and abducting another. In both cases those kidnappings and attacks — whose similarity is not coincidental — prompted a military response on the part of the Israel Defense Forces.

Peru recognizes Israel's right to self-defence and security. However it must exercise that right in accordance with the principles and norms of the Charter. Furthermore, we call for the application of international humanitarian law, particularly in this context of generalized violence, so as to prevent further civilian loss of life and damage to the infrastructure of Lebanon and Gaza. Israel must refrain from the excessive use of force. All parties to the conflict have a duty to respect the lives and human rights of Lebanese and Palestinian, as well as Israeli, civilians.

Peru profoundly regrets the harm caused to Palestinian, Lebanese and Israeli civilians. Given the escalating violence in Lebanon, it is essential that the Lebanese Government implement the decision taken a few months ago to disarm those groups operating in the refugee camps and elsewhere. There is an imperative need to restore the monopoly on the use of force in Lebanon. As Hizbollah has shown, not only does the capacity of such groups constitute an ongoing challenge to the authority of the Lebanese State, but, worse still, their actions could embroil Lebanon in an international conflict, which no one wants to see.

Furthermore, we should recall that any solution to the crisis in the region must take into account the requirements set out by the Quartet for the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. In this context, it must recognize Israel, renounce violence and respect the agreements previously entered into by the Palestinian Authority.

A few weeks ago, in this very Chamber, we urgently called for decisive action on the part of the Quartet, at the highest level, leading to a permanent ceasefire, the Palestinian Authority's handover of the kidnapped member of the Israel Defense Forces and the release of imprisoned elected Palestinian Authority officials. That call should today be extended to Lebanon, with a view to bringing about a ceasefire and the release of the two soldiers taken hostage by Hizbollah.

Peru expresses its full support for the special mission sent to the region by the Secretary-General under the leadership of his Special Adviser, Ambassador Vijay Nambiar, and including Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen and Ambassador Alvaro de Soto. We therefore call upon all States concerned, other members of the Quartet and the protagonists involved to extend to them their full cooperation and assistance, so that the mission can fully meet its objectives.

**Ms. Løj** (Denmark): During the last few weeks, we have seen the situation in the Middle East deteriorate steadily. An already very difficult situation has become even more volatile, with dire consequences not only for the civilian population but also for the prospects for lasting peace. In the midst of all this grim news, the relationship between Lebanon and Israel has worsened. It now poses a grave threat to the wider security of the region.

My Government has condemned Hizbollah's provocations in the strongest possible terms. Those who provide the means to carry out its deadly attacks are equally responsible for their consequences. Moreover, given the prevailing tensions, Hizbollah's attacks inside Israel are simply irresponsible and unacceptable.

The abducted Israeli soldiers must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Denmark is unwavering in its recognition of the right of States to self-defence — in this case Israel's. However, care must be taken to ensure that the exercise of that right is proportional and measured. All actions must conform to international law and must be carried out with due respect for the obligations of States to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in times of war.

Denmark is gravely concerned about the wide-scale damage caused by Israel's actions to civilian life and infrastructure. Of special concern is the attack on the civilian airport in Beirut and the air and sea blockade against Lebanon. My Government strongly urges Israel to show utmost restraint.

The Security Council has repeatedly called on the Government of Lebanon to restore its sovereignty over all its national territory and to exercise the sole right to the use of force on that territory. My Government welcomes the fact that the Lebanese Government has distanced itself from Hizbollah's actions. We join in urging all countries in the region to act responsibly and to do everything possible to calm the situation.

The humanitarian consequences of recent developments are cause for grave concern. The situation is alarming and requires urgent attention, first and foremost from the parties but also from the international community.

In conclusion, the level of tension in the region makes it imperative that all parties refrain from any action that would inflame the already tense situation. In this situation, the Secretary-General's decision to dispatch to the Middle East a senior diplomatic mission is extremely timely and welcome. The parties must extend their full cooperation to this team, as well as to delegations from other key players, allowing them to fulfil their missions to contain the conflict. Any effort to ease the tension in this dire situation, including the efforts of the Secretary-General, are very welcome.

**Mr. Mlynár** (Slovakia): At the outset, let me thank Under-Secretaries-General Guéhenno and Gambari for their very valuable briefings this morning.

Slovakia is deeply concerned about the recent events in southern Lebanon and northern Israel. At the same time, we are very concerned about the bombings of the cities and suburbs of Beirut and Haifa, as well as many other towns in the region.

We would like to emphasize that loss of civilian life and attacks on civilian infrastructure are very alarming.

According to the latest information, the Israel Defense Forces are imposing a blockade against Lebanon, violating its airspace and destroying its infrastructure, including bridges, airports and power stations. From the Hizbollah side, the rocket shelling of the towns of Qiryat, Shemona, Nahariyya and Safed in northern Israel is continuing as well.

The escalation of the situation is accelerating on a dangerous course, with both parties suspicious of one another and refusing to halt military action.

We are convinced that the international community and the Security Council must react swiftly and appeal to all parties to immediately cease all actions that could provoke a further escalation of the situation and lead to further deterioration of the already extremely serious humanitarian situation. All parties must agree to a ceasefire, end the blockade and return to negotiate peaceful solutions to all the causes of the escalation of the situation in southern Lebanon and northern Israel.

We recognize and acknowledge the right of each and every State to self-defence. But that right cannot, and should not, be confused with counterattacks or acts of military provocation. Both parties must refrain from the disproportionate use of force. We call upon them to exercise the utmost restraint.

We strongly condemn all terrorist attacks, in particular those directed against civilians. We express our deepest sympathies to the families of all the victims, as well as to the Governments of Lebanon and of Israel.

We would like to repeat what we said in the Council yesterday, and have stated many times before, namely that reaching a just and lasting peace in the Middle East region will be possible only when all parties cease their fire and refrain from any military or violent action. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict is through peaceful negotiations. Previous commitments, agreements and the Council's resolutions, in particular resolution 1559 (2004), must be respected and fully implemented. We would like to reiterate that all parties must resume constructive dialogue and take concrete actions aimed at building and strengthening mutual confidence and trust.

The two Israeli soldiers should be released immediately and unconditionally, rocket shelling should be stopped and the Blue Line respected.

The international community, including the Council, must remain actively engaged in the peace process in the Middle East. However, both sides must do more and demonstrate clear political will and a commitment to ending this protracted conflict which threatens international peace and security. Despite the latest wave of violence and hostilities, we believe there is still a window of opportunity for all parties to put the peace process on the right track. That opportunity must be seized through concrete and immediate action leading from mutual recognition of the right to exist to mutual peaceful coexistence.

In this context, Slovakia welcomes and fully supports the role of the Secretary-General and his senior-level team led by Mr. Nambiar, which has just been dispatched to the region. We sincerely hope that the team will achieve the results that we are all wishing for. My Government has issued a statement today and, for its part, is ready to contribute, if necessary, to the humanitarian relief efforts in Lebanon.

**Mrs. Papadopoulou** (Greece): I would like to join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Gambari and Under-Secretary-General Guéhenno for their briefings today.

In the last few days, we have been witnessing events in the Middle East spiralling out of control and reaching new, unacceptable levels of violence and tension unseen in the last few years. The situation seems to be worsening by the hour.

It was only two weeks ago that, during our last discussion on the developments in the region (see S/PV.5481), we expressed our great concern over the violence in the Palestinian territories and condemned in the strongest possible terms the killing of an Israeli civilian hostage and the continuing holding of an Israeli soldier, as well as the killings of innocent civilians, including women and children, by the Israeli armed forces.

Today we can only stress once more our deep concern at the latest events unfolding as we speak, this time around the border between Israel and Lebanon, an area which has been enjoying relative calm over the last six years.

We deplore the recent attack by Hizbollah which resulted in the killing of a number of Israeli soldiers and the abduction of another two, as well as its continuing firing of Katyusha rockets into Israeli territory, which has led to the killing of at least two civilians and the wounding of many more. We call upon Hizbollah to release the two abducted soldiers immediately and without preconditions and to refrain from such actions in the future.

We equally deplore and express our deep alarm at the Israeli counterattacks, which have resulted in the killing of more than 50 Lebanese civilians, including 10 children, and the wounding of 100 more, as well as in the destruction of civilian infrastructure in the country. We continue to believe that, while preserving the right of self-defence, Israel must respect its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Actions which are contrary to international law can only aggravate the vicious circle of violence and retribution and cannot serve anyone's legitimate security concerns.

In that respect, we call upon Israel to immediately halt the disproportionate use of force, put an end to its attacks against civilian population areas and public infrastructure, such as the international airport of Beirut, refrain from violating Lebanese air space and lift the naval and air blockade of Lebanon.

It is imperative for the Lebanese Government to take effective and immediate strong action to prevent further attacks against Israel by Hizbollah. At the same time, it is of crucial importance not to jeopardize the stability of Lebanon, while preserving and respecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity by, inter alia, full implementation of Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1559 (2004).

We express our support with regard to the appeal of the Lebanese Government for a comprehensive ceasefire and call upon all parties concerned to exercise restraint and demonstrate a spirit of composure, which is absolutely necessary in this very critical moment.

In that context, Greece would like to express its strong support for the upcoming mission of the Secretary-General's envoys in the region and its hope that it can obtain concrete results in the immediate future in terms of re-stabilizing the situation in the area.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I thank Mr. Guéhenno and Mr. Gambari for their statements.

France is extremely concerned by the escalation of violence between Israel and Lebanon. Hizbollah bears responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities. Once again, we condemn Thursday's attacks on Israeli territory which killed or wounded several Israeli soldiers. We condemn the abduction of two of them and we demand once again their immediate and unconditional release. We condemn ongoing rocket fire on Israeli territory which is striking and killing indiscriminately.

The Lebanese Government has dissociated itself from this irresponsible and deliberate provocation, but it must shoulder its responsibilities and abide by the commitments it has taken before this Council by working effectively to restore its authority throughout its territory and by mobilizing more actively all Lebanese political actors in support of disarming Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias in accordance with the Taif Agreement and Security Council resolutions.

Israel has the right to defend its territory and its citizens when they are attacked — and they have been attacked. But we condemn the disproportionate nature of the response, which has already claimed many civilian victims and has caused significant material damage. In its breadth and its nature, the Israeli response threatens to erase efforts undertaken by the Lebanese Government to restore the country's economy and to restore State authority throughout the territory. It jeopardizes efforts undertaken over the past year to consolidate Lebanese democracy and to ensure the reconciliation of its people.

Moreover, France condemns the destruction of civilian and military infrastructure as a result of operations carried out by Israel as well as the air and sea blockade imposed on Lebanon. The Lebanese people must not be taken hostage. Freedom of movement for the population as well as for foreigners in Lebanon must be restored without delay. France cannot accept that its citizens should be prevented from

returning to their country. With its European partners, it will work to ensure that a very rapid solution to this situation is found.

We call upon all parties in Lebanon and in Israel to refrain from any new action which would further feed the cycle of violence and endanger the civilian population. There can be no military solution to this crisis, just as there can be no military solution to any of the conflicts that have affected the Middle East for decades.

France has constantly said that these conflicts fuel one another and are interwoven. The history of this region for nearly 60 years has tragically shown that violence and the struggle for power have resolved nothing. On the contrary, they feed other conflicts and cause further violence and tragedy, with the civilian population being the primary victims.

Given this very risky and intense crisis, international diplomacy is now working in an attempt to define the terms for a peaceful solution, in particular within the United Nations framework, through the mission sent to the region by the Secretary-General, and within the framework of the European Union. Of course, France wholeheartedly supports these efforts, which can consider how to avoid direct confrontation. France, as solemnly stated by President Chirac today, calls upon the parties to immediately cease hostilities, which is the only way to give a chance to mediation efforts. It calls upon everyone to scrupulously respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all parties and to cooperate fully with efforts under way taken by the international community.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda. I invite the Members of the Council to consultations following the adjournment of this meeting.

*The meeting rose at noon.*